only marginally by 0.3% over the month ended 1 st February, 2003. However, in order to enable the farmers to achieve higher level of production and productivity a number of initiatives have been taken by the Government. Taking into account the increase in input cost caused by drought, the Government have announced on-time Special Drought Relief varying from Rs. 5 to Rs. 10 per quintal for the Rabi crops. Besides, Minimum Support Price has been increased by Rs. 20 per quintal each for Gram and Masur, and by Rs. 30 per quintal for Rapeseed/Mustard. Other measures include promotion of watershed development, development and promotion of new technology etc. As regards oilseeds, in addition to the measures aimed at promoting production and productivity, import of edible oils is allowed freely to bridge the gap between domestic production availability.

Import duty on cotton

*73. SHRI A. VIJAYA RAGHAVAN: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the prices of cotton reached all time low during 2001;

(b) whether it is also a fact that the import of cotton had increased in the country steeply;

(c) if so, whether Government evaluated the impact of the increased import on the cotton producing areas;

(d) if so, the details thereof;

(e) whether Government have taken steps to increase import duty on cotton on the permissible level in accordance with the WTO conditions;

(f) if so, the details thereof; and

(g) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI AJIT SINGH): (a) The prices of cotton during the peak months of 2001 -02 season were low as compared to prices during the corresponding period of last season. However, the annual average prices in certain years that is 1990-91, 1991 -92,1992-93 and 1993-94 were lower than the annual average prices of 2001-02.

(b) Import of cotton for the last five years is given below:

(Qty. in lakh bales of 170 kg. each)

Year	Import of Cotton
1997-98	4.13
1998-99	7.87
1999-2000	22.01
2000-2001	22.13
2001-2002	24.70
2002-2003 (Anticipated)	20.00

Cotton imports have increased from 4.13 lakh bales in 1997-98 to 24.7 lakh bales in 2001-02.

(c) and (d) Yes, Sir. Government has taken note of the continuous increase in imports and its effect on domestic cotton crop. The increase in cotton imports is due to (i) cotton being placed under OGL (Open General License) from April, 1994 so that cotton mills can import cotton of any staple/variety from any country without quantitative limit, (ii) tight supply position of cotton in the country leading to increase in domestic prices and (iii) continuous decline in international cotton prices and disparity with domestic prices which were higher than international cotton prices.

(e) to (g)To discourage higher cotton imports Government has doubled the import duty on cotton from 5% *ad valorem* to 10% *ad valorem,* with effect from 9th January, 2002.

Funds for safety in Railways

*74. SHRIMATI VANGA GEETHA: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether in an effort to curb the rising number of accidents, the Railways have increased spending on safety related matters;

(b) whether General Managers of Zonal Railways will have more funds at their disposal for this purpose; and

(c) if so, what amount they would have now and what was the limit of funds previously?